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ABSTRACT

This program, developed for the secondary level, focuses on how our society looks at aging. Three lessons are included which deal with misconceptions about aging in America, the normal dependencies of aging, and economics and the older person. The lesson on misconceptions is intended to help break down stereotypes young people have about older people and to help students understand the process of aging in general. The lesson on normal dependencies of aging is intended to show that dependencies are a normal process of aging, and to help students understand the four basic categories of dependencies for the aged. The lesson on economics will enable the student to determine what the major sources of income for the aged person are, explain why income maintenance is a major concern for the elderly, and list the possible expenses incurred by the aged. Content and/or procedures, instructional materials, and evaluation techniques are included for all lessons. (Author/KA)

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HOW OUR SOCIETY LOOKS

AT AGING

by Renaldo Rivera

CG 013040

UNIT TOPIC: HOW OUR SOCIETY LOOKS AT AGING

GRADE LEVEL: This unit can be adopted for social studies courses in grades 7 through 12 or used as a mini course of three lessons. The teacher is encouraged to develop a variety of learning activities such as: simulations, learning stations, field trips, etc.

Lesson I: ALLEVIATING MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING AGING AND AGING IN AMERICA

I. INTRODUCTION

There are conflicting views as to the personality changes that occur during the middle and later years of life. Generally, aspects of personality measurement lie closer to biological than to social determinants of behavior. Just as biological organisms show unmistakable signs of maturing during the period from forty to sixty-five; so does the personality concept, but within a considerable range the changes seem to remain relatively dependent on social performance and personal satisfaction with life. Only when there is gross biological malfunction or illness is the dependence between biological and social functions destroyed.

II. DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVES

- A. This lesson is intended to help break down the many stereotypes young people have about older people.
- B. Students are to understand the process of aging in general.

III. CONTENT AND/OR PROCEDURE

This three part lesson will consist of:

- A. Historical Trends in Life Expectancy: Since the days of the Babylonian

and Roman empires, the average life expectancies of the human populations have been improving, but these improvements have been slow in coming, at least until the last two centuries. Life expectancy at birth since 1000 B.C. was approximately 18 years, but in 1970 the average life expectancy at birth in the United States was 70.9 years. More young people live to be old.

B. Age Composition of the Population: The number of elderly in the United States has increased dramatically since 1900, representing a larger share of the total population for each succeeding decade. Not only has the older population of the United States grown from 3.1 million in 1900 to almost 20.2 million in 1970, but their proportion of the total has increased by almost 2.5 times (from 4.1 percent in 1900 to 9.9 percent in 1970). As a matter of fact, the 65 and over age group is growing at a greater percentage rate world wide than any other age group. However, there is evidence to indicate that bias is increasing against this age group. Mass media has helped to create a negative attitude toward aging such as picturing aging as a dependent period of time or retirement as the end of personal growth. Obviously, this is nonsense.

C. Stereotypes which lead to misconceptions concerning aging:

1. (The elderly don't want to be around young people!) In reality, a visit to an elderly relative or friend by young people could alleviate the boredom of a nursing home, retirement center, or an attractive house. If possible, the young person should have a real reason for wanting to see the person involved: pictures to show or to be identified, a question about the family in other days or lands, a good school record to show.

2. There is not great physical or mental degeneration among the aged! Both physically and psychologically, older people are resilient in recovering from stress and illness. When catastrophe strikes in the form of debilitating illness, loss of property, or rejection by relatives, the older person is not traumatized much more than a younger person. There is some deterioration of physical and mental processes, but this can be slowed down if the mind and body of the aged are kept active.
3. Most people tend to think that the aged are unattractive! The society of the Western World tends to worship youth. Only young people are considered beautiful and desirable from every point of view. Women, in particular, make every effort to retain their youthful appearance by means of foundation garments, hair dye, pancake make-up, and many other means. Among men, too, it is considered socially desirable to appear young and vigorous long after this is really possible on the basis of reality. The attitude of society as such has tended to make all elderly people feel inferior, inadequate, ugly, and unattractive for no other reason than that they are old. This certainly constitutes an extremely important and debilitating trauma to the aged. In no other society is it necessary to experience the feeling of guilt simply because of a condition over which no voluntary control is possible, namely, the aging process.
4. The aged are old-fashioned or poorly groomed! In reality for every elderly man and woman who is unnecessarily shabby, out-of-fashion, and poorly groomed, there are many others who are part of main-

stream America. They may be erect, immaculate, charmingly old-fashioned, distinguished, or distinctive. Clothing being designed for older people are in style and affordable. There are enough older men and women who make the kind of chic appearance that is appropriate to their age to offset the generally negative feeling our society has about old people.

D. Procedure

1. Lecture - the instructor will use the lecture method to inform the students of some of the many misconceptions our society holds concerning the aged.
2. Discussion - students will be encouraged to discuss some of their personal misconceptions concerning the aged.
3. Role Playing - students will act out the roles of aged people in different situations (which will point out their misconceptions).
4. Question/Answer Period - there will be a continuous question/answer period to educate the students.

IV. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

A. Texts:

1. Aging: Psychological Changes by Sue H. Erp and Jean D. Freeman, Continuing Education Publications, Corvallis, Oregon, 1971.
2. Growing Old Is a Family Affair by Dorothy B. Fritz, John Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1972.

B. Bibliography

1. Lang, Gladys Engels (ed.), Old Age in America, H.W. Wilson Company, New York, 1961.

2. Lawton, George, Aging Successfully, Columbia University Press, New York, 1946.
3. Steincrohn, Peter J., Live Longer and Enjoy It, Prentice-Hall Company, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1956.
4. Stern, Edith, and Mabel Ross, You and Your Aging Parents, Harper and Rowe, New York, 1965.
5. Vischer, Adolf L., On Growing Old, translated by Gerold Onn, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts, 1967.

C. Essays:

1. Crowe, Charles M., "Getting Ready for Tomorrow," Abingdon Press, New York, 1959.
2. Scott-Maxwell, Florida, "The Measure of My Days," Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1968.

D. Films:

1. "The Aging"

V. EVALUATION

There will be a review exercise after each part of this three part lesson.

A. True/False Questions (examples):

1. _____ (T/F) An individual's perceptions of a situation involves both feelings and cognitive information.
2. _____ (T/F) American culture helps old people feel worthy by telling them to relax and take it easy.
3. _____ (T/F) Humor and harmony are essential ingredients for mature personality.

B. Fill in the Blanks (examples):

1. What is a basic difference between youth and old people in problem solving approaches? Old people tend to search their own repertoire for possible solutions; youth are more inclined to use novel approaches.
2. List three behaviors often found in older adults which indicate situations may be threatening. Withdrawal from the situation; sticking with familiar tasks he knows he can do; avoiding creative experiences or innovative ideas.

Lesson 2: THE NORMAL DEPENDENCIES OF AGING

I. INTRODUCTION

This lesson is addressed to dependency as a state of being, not a state of mind; a state of being in which to be old, as to be young, is to be dependent. Such dependency is not pathological, it is not wrong; it is, in fact, a right of the old recognized by most, if not all, societies. It cannot be cured, and the only way to forestall it is to die young. In short, it is the normal dependency or dependencies of old age that are the focus that follows.

II. DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVES

- A. This lesson is intended to show that dependencies are a normal process of aging.
- B. Students are to understand the four basic categories of dependencies for the aged.

III. CONTENT AND/OR PROCEDURE

This four-part lesson will consist of:

- A. Economic Dependency: This dependency stems from having crossed over from the productive to the consumer status in the economy. No longer a wage earner, or the spouse of a wage earner, and not begin able to accumulate sufficient savings to support himself through 15-25 years of retirement, the older person typically finds himself dependent on income transfers from the currently working generation, provided primarily through taxes but also in contributions from children and other younger relatives.
- B. Physical Dependency: This dependency arises from the simple fact that in the process of aging, muscle strength inevitably diminishes, sensory acuity decreases, reflexes are slower, coordination is poorer, and the general level of energy is lower. The ordinary chores of living - personal self-care and grooming, keeping up one's living quarters, preparing or securing food, transporting oneself from place to place, shopping, participating in social functions, etc. - become increasingly difficult, strenuous, and eventually impossible to perform entirely without aid.
- C. Mental Dependency: This dependency arises from a decline in the power of mental processes paralleling the decline in physical power, but occurring more slowly or not reaching such magnitude as to be seen as a source of dependency until quite advanced old age. At that time, when deterioration or change in the central nervous system produces marked deficits in memory, orientation, comprehension, and judgment, the old person, quite literally, no longer can use his head to solve his problems and direct his affairs; he must rely on the cognitive functions of others.

D. Social Dependency: In some cases, this dependency develops out of a complex of factors and losses. As the individual ages, he loses persons who are important objects and sources of affection, stimulation, and assistance. He loses roles that are the basis of status and power, and avenues to social participation. He loses contemporaneity as his knowledge, values, and expectations become obsolete in a fast-changing society. He becomes without volition a progressively isolated and disengaged nonparticipant in the surrounding social world, increasingly dependent on bureaucratized substitutes for missing health, kin, and agents of former days, increasingly dependent on recognition by others of his rights rather than his power. He becomes dependent on the social conscience of the generation in positions of authority, those who currently have all that he has lost in the way of vitality and performance. In other words, in old age, without the powers of his prime - economic, physical, mental, and social - one is dependent on the ethical responses of his fellow man.

E. Procedure: The teacher can discuss some of the solutions for the normal dependencies of aging:

1. Self-Solution - whereby the older person himself seeks to modify his behavior or circumstances. For example, he balances his budget by restricting consumption; he conserves his energy by restricting his activities; he bolsters his failing memory by writing notes to himself; he counters his social losses by social engagement. This is the first line of defense. Such maneuvers are sensible and valid ways of coping, up to a point; beyond it they become increasingly pathological and may jeopardize the survival of the individual.
2. The Kinship Solution - The most common type among those of advanced

requires the existence and proximity of children or other relatives. For the aged who are fortunate enough to have concerned and capable kin, most of their dependent needs can be and usually are met by the care-giving services of such kin.

Typically, the old person remains in his own home as long as he is capable of personal self-care. However, children or other relatives increasingly take on or assist with the heavier tasks of housekeeping and home maintenance, provide transportation and escort, manage his financial affairs, supervise his health care, nurse him in times of illness, and in general watch over him, substituting their strength, mobility, and judgment for his declining abilities. As he becomes more frail he is likely to move into the home of a relative where more personal care and protective supervision can be given. Only a small minority are institutionalized, and then only when the demand for intensive and skilled care rises beyond the capacity of family members.

These, too, are sensible and valid solutions up to a point; but if carried too far they become destructive to both the old and their kin. An excessive burden of care can so overwhelm a family as to actually endanger its members' physical, emotional, and social stability, or else result in a complete and irreversible rejection of the old person with all the accompanying guilt and suffering.

3. The Societal Solution consists of arrangements or programs through which society assists its members to cope with needs and problems beyond the resources of the individual or his primary group. It assigns consumer rights to goods and services by nonmarket criteria. Social insurance, public housing, and rent supplementation are good examples of such solutions.

Under the impact of modern living conditions (urbanization, increasing technology, mobility of population, disappearance of the three-generation household, extension of the retirement years), there is a tremendous need to develop and expand imaginative and inventive societal solutions to the normal dependencies of aging. The pressing requirements of a fast-growing aged population will not allow any organization, agency, or community to organize itself on a mass basis that will be sufficient to ensure all the necessary services for all the elderly whenever they may require such services.

4. Role Playing - The teacher can set up a family or societal situation in which the student, acting as an aged person, must depend upon someone else to solve a problem or need.
5. Lecture - The instructor will use the lecture method to inform the students of some of the dependency problems faced by the aged in different situations.

IV. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

A. Texts:

1. The Dependencies of Old People by Richard A. Kalish, Editor, Institute of Gerontology, The University of Michigan Wayne State University, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1969.
2. Aging: Psychological Changes by Sue H. Erp and Jean D. Freeman Continuing Education Publications, Corvallis, Oregon, 1971.

B. Bibliography:

1. Birren, J. E. The Psychology of Aging, Prentice Hall Company, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1964.
2. Kahn, A., "Social Services in Relation to Income Security: Introductory Notes," Social Service Review, Vol. 39 (December, 1965), pp. 381-389.
3. Kastenbaum, R., "Is Old Age the End of Development?", in R. Kastenbaum (ed.), New Thoughts on Old Age, Springer Press, New York, New York, 1964.
4. Kuhlen, R. G., "Aging and Life Adjustment," in J. E. Birren (ed.) Handbook of Aging and the Individual, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1959.
5. Reichard, S., F. Livson, and P. Peterson, Aging and Personality, John Wiley Company, New York, New York, 1962.
6. Rosow, I., "Old Age: One Moral Dilemma of an Affluent Society," The Gerontologist, Vol. 2 (December, 1962), pp. 182-191.
7. Stehouwer, J., "The Household and Family Relation of Old People," in E. Shanas, et. al., Old People in Three Industrial Societies, Atherton Press, New York, New York, 1968.
8. Townsend, P., "Welfare Service and the Family," in E. Shanas, et. al., Old People in Three Industrial Societies, Atherton Press, New York, New York, 1968.

V. EVALUATION

There will be a teacher generated review exercise after each part of this four part lesson:

- A. Essay Question
- B. True/False Questions

- C. Fill in the Blanks
- D. Matching
- E. A report on some self-generated idea concerning the problems increasing dependency can cause the aged.

Lesson 3: ECONOMICS AND THE OLDER PERSON

I. INTRODUCTION

In the United States there is general agreement that no person, no matter how old, should be forced to suffer economic distress. This is the "humanitarian" objective on which much of current social and economic policy is based. The problem of how to provide for those in economic distress is of special concern to those interested in the economic welfare of the elderly population. Through various approaches, social agencies are continually contributing to understanding and solving this problem. This lesson describes some of the economic problems of the older population: the effects of inflation on a person with a fixed income, the lack of employment opportunities, and the concerns about general financial security.

II. DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to:

- A. Determine what the major sources of income for the aged person are.
- B. Explain why income maintenance is a major concern for the elderly.
- C. List the possible expenses incurred by the aged.

III. CONTENT AND/OR PROCEDURES

This three-part lesson will consist of:

- A. Independence: Independence is largely a matter of finances and health. As the aged population grows larger, there are growing numbers of aging people who are able to live without depending upon any outside assistance. The success of such living is the result of careful planning and common

sense. In the twenty years beyond the customary job retirement age of sixty-five certain realities must be faced. Much depends on what has been done through middle age to guard health and build reserves of income and to develop sound attitudes toward aging.

The obvious answer to economic dependency among persons no longer in the labor market is either to supply them with money, or pay their bills. This in effect is what we have done in the United States for the older person; but we have done it penuriously and, for too many, we have done it demeaningly.

Building on our present social insurance system, we could take care of this particular dependency by constituting universal coverage of all retired or disabled persons 60 years and over, and making the minimum benefit sufficient to secure a modest but adequate standard of living. We could remove the questionable co-insurance and deductible provisions from Medicare, add some provisions for "preventicare," and thus insure that all, not just part, of the elderly's medical bills will be paid. We could, once and for all insofar as the aged are concerned, get rid of the means-test approach to economic dependency.

Presently, neither old age insurance nor all age assistance is meeting the economic need of our older citizens. If they were, the old would not comprise a large minority of the poor we talk so much about today. The war on poverty, in the aged sector, can be won easily as soon as we grant that the main cause of poverty is lack of money, and set about providing necessary funds.

B. Whether independent or dependent there are these general needs for the aging:

1. Good health, to the extent possible
2. Financial security
3. Comfort
4. Appropriate and satisfactory living arrangements
5. Companionship and affection
6. Interpersonal relationships, if possible across age groups
7. Varied occupations, creative activities
8. Continued usefulness, being needed in some way
9. A settled life philosophy
10. A sound faith and close relationship with its organized group (as church or synagogue).

C. The economic situation of older people remains a major problem, despite contemporary increases in benefits from Social Security, private pension plans, or the Medicare program. Food, housing, and health care costs are rising far more quickly than are the economic resources of older people, especially those not in the labor force and those located in central cities. Indeed, the combination of relatively fixed incomes and substantial annual inflation has made the economic plight of the older person particularly precarious.

D. Many schemes for meeting economic need are in the air these days. We hear talk of the guaranteed income, the negative income tax, the increase of social services to the elderly, etc. There is no group for whom it is more politically feasible to move toward these modern concepts of income maintenance than the aged. In fact, we already have moved toward the idea of

extending Social Security coverage to persons without a history of eligible employment. To end more of the poverty among our older citizens we need only extend coverage to all retired persons over a given age, and increase substantially the minimum benefit (doubling, or better tripling, the present amount and instituting some cost-of-living device to protect against further inflation).

- E. Procedure - To empathize with some of the problems facing the elderly, students role play aged persons who can manage only with walkers; they block out a daily schedule for a 74 year-old man; they plan a monthly budget based on bills, pension, and social security payments; and they write essays on their hopes and expectations for their own later life.

IV. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

A. Texts:

1. The Dependencies of Old People by Richard A. Kalish, Ed., Institute of Gerontology, The University of Michigan Wayne State University, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1969.
2. Aging: Psychological Changes by Sue H. Erp and Jean D. Freeman, Continuing Education Publications, Corvallis, Oregon, 1971.

B. Bibliography:

1. Beauvoir, Simone De, The Coming of Age, G. P. Putnam and Sons, New York, New York, 1972.
2. Birren, J. E., "A Brief History of the Psychology of Aging," Part I, Part II, Gerontologist, Vol. 1, 1961, pp. 69-77 and 127-134.
3. Birren, J. E. (ed.) Handbook of Aging and the Individual, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1960.
4. Rutler, Robert N., Why Survive?: Being Old in America, Harper and Row, New York, New York, 1975.
5. Lee, Donald H., A Selected, Annotated Bibliography on Aging and the Aged: 1968-1972, Council of Planning Librarians, Monticello, Illinois, 1972.

6. Morgan, James N., "Measuring the Economic Status of the Aged," International Economic Review, Vol, 6, January, pp. 1-17.
7. Schulz, James, "Retirement: Background and Issues," 1971 White House Conference on Aging, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1971.
8. United States Bureau of the Census, "Characteristics of the Low Income Population," Current Population Reports, Consumer Income, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1973.

V. EVALUATION

The sources used to study aging are senior citizens themselves. Through a series of social activities and discussion sessions, the students and the older participants will be given an opportunity to get to know each other by exploring attitudes and values. This direct contact is intended to help break down the many stereotypes young people have about older people, the process of aging in general, and the preparation one makes for dying. The contacts can also help the senior citizens reevaluate their attitudes about today's young people.

To evaluate this part of the course, the teacher can require students to answer a questionnaire concerning their attitudes about the finances of the aged at the beginning of the course and again at the end. Student responses to the questionnaires should reveal that by treating aging as a fact of life, class participants are better able to discern reality from cultural conditioning.

Other methods of evaluation will include: true/false questions, fill in the blanks, and matching.

By the end of the course, students should have learned that growing old is not something to dread; that older people are old only in body; that being 60 does not mean senility, dependence, and death; and that senior citizens, like people of all other ages, are worthwhile members of society.